
DESIGNING CONVERSATION: BOOK DISCUSSIONS IN A PRIMARY INCLUSION CLASSROOM

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Abstract. This study examined the nature of student talk and the teacher's role during book discussions. The participants were 17 first- and second-graders with and without disabilities in an inner-city inclusion classroom. Applied conversation analysis techniques were employed to analyze two videotaped book discussions. Results indicated that student-selected topics and contingent talk were necessary for fluent conversational discourse. Additionally, the teacher's role was crucial in apprenticing students to deal with a novel participant structure and its attendant complex linguistic and cognitive requirements. Results also demonstrated the competence with which students with disabilities assumed influential and decisive roles in the discussions. Implications for students with disabilities are discussed in terms of opportunities for self-expression and involvement in constructing and negotiating the activity.

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Conversation, whether ordinary or institutional, can be defined as "talk-in-interaction" (Schegloff, 1989) that must be negotiated with others to be effective. Institutional conversation typically possesses institution-specific goals and structures (Silverman, 2001), exemplified in school classrooms by the traditional initiation-response-evaluation pattern (I-R-E) (Mehan, 1979). However, an increasing awareness among educators of the social, as well as academic, aspects of cognition has resulted in increased use of a more reciprocal model of classroom conversation that emphasizes student participation leading to autonomy and empowerment in classroom interaction.

Learning more conversation-like patterns of classroom talk presents difficulties for some children. For example, young children are developmentally unpre-

pared to handle conversational skills such as topic-sharing. Children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds typically have not participated in conversations with their caregivers to the same extent as middle-class students, and thus exhibit fewer conversational skills (Bloom, 1998). Further, children with disabilities, including many who have language and learning disabilities, often display expressive and receptive communication difficulties, are less engaged in social interactions than their general education counterparts, and tend to experience greater difficulty with the pragmatics of conversational discourse (Alves & Gottlieb, 1986; Mathinos, 1991; McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, & Lee, 1993).

Insufficient research attention has been given to the ways in which children are active in the teaching-

learning process (Biemiller & Meichenbaum, 1998; Stone, 1998). For example, the promotion of conversational skills to increase student autonomy and self-regulation, in particular, has generally not been emphasized in classroom research. Yet, in the area of the language arts, there has been increasing recognition that students' participation in book discussions may have positive influences on the acquisition of higher-order thought and mental processes (Raphael, Pardo, Highfield, & McMahon, 1997) as well as the development of conversational skills.

This study examined the processes by which first- and second-grade students were supported to become more proficient in literary conversations. The focus of this research was a group of students with language and learning disabilities (LLD) for whom participation in conversations about literature is often a challenge.

Effective Literature Discussions

The conception of what literate performance means has broadened, since "state and national frameworks emphasize substantive goals such as understanding the purposes and features of different kinds of narrative texts (narrative, informative, persuasive) and understanding the meaning of sophisticated literary concepts such as imagery, metaphor, and point of view" (Morocco, Hindin, Mata-Aguilar, & Clark-Chiarelli, 2001, p. 47). Thus, students are expected to make inferences about character motivation, recognize a wide range of text genres, apply a theme to a literary text, describe their own responses to a text, engage in literary reasoning, and provide evidence to support an interpretation (Marzano & Kendall, 1995; Morocco, Cobb, & Hindin, 2002; Morocco et al., 2001). Many of these interpretative strategies and reasoning abilities are the focus of literature discussion frameworks employed in schools (Raphael et al., 1997).

Four fundamental processes are necessary for students to participate effectively in literature discussions. First, literary response requires the acquisition of new *language and interpretive skills* (see Barnes, 1993; Englert, Tarrant, Mariage, & Oser, 1994; Gee, 1992; Lemke, 1987; Wells, 1999). These skills include knowledge of the interpretative responses and stances to texts used by skilled readers, including those that are (a) text-based (knowledge of genre or story grammar, as well as responses sequencing events, summarizing, and understanding character motivation); (b) reader-based (personal experience, feelings or affect, putting self in situation); and (c) author-based (understanding author's craft, motive) (Raphael et al., 1997). These requirements offer particular challenges for students with LLD, who have problems generating multiple interpretations of a text, engaging in story comprehen-

sion, understanding or using metaphor, moving beyond literal interpretations to share personal feelings and experiences, evaluating text, and drawing on multiple sources of information (Goatley, 1997; Idol & Croll, 1987; Kuder, 2003; Wiig & Semel, 1984).

A second set of processes for effective discussions involves *shifts in the structure of power and authority*. That is, the teacher does not remain in the position of ultimate "cognitive authority," but gradually shifts responsibility to students for employing interpretative strategies, as well as for asking questions, clarifying meanings, and justifying and evaluating answers. In such mutually constituted discussions, students have power to shape the direction of the discourse as they are called upon to introduce topics and questions, build on one another's ideas, finish each other's incomplete sentences, and struggle to understand unfamiliar ideas and perspectives (Barnes, 1993). From time to time, students' talk may sound tentative and cognitively uncertain, but these are the occasions when their ideas and perspectives can be developed, synthesized, shaped or opposed, as they construct and reconstruct ideas in the context of the thinking of the entire group (John-Steiner & Meehan, 2000). Simultaneously, through participation in challenging discussions, students come to know they have the capability to undertake the rigorous work of intellectual inquiry. The goal of book discussions is to internalize thought and interpretative response, but in order to achieve that end, a supportive context must be created that furthers students' opportunities and abilities to observe, communicate, and receive feedback on their literary thoughts, decisions, and choices.

A third set of processes for furthering the participation of students in literature discussions involves the use of *specific teaching processes that support the advancement of students' interpretative skills and discussion performance*. An apprenticeship model, with its concomitant emphases on modeling, coaching, and gradually transferring control to students for implementing and regulating interpretative strategies in book discussions, has been found to be an important basis for the successful instruction and self-regulated use of cognitive strategies in a number of literacy contexts, such as reading (Palincsar, 1986; Palincsar & Brown, 1989; Palincsar, Brown, & Campione, 1993; Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000) and writing (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003; Englert & Dunsmore, 2002; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003). A high level of responsiveness is typical of the teacher who uses the talk of students to assess current states of knowledge, and then makes contingent and scaffolded responses based upon those assessments in order to nudge students' development beyond extant levels of performance (Goldenberg, 1993; Stone, 2002). For students with LLD, it is especially important that

teachers offer graduated assistance and a hierarchy of support based on what students know and need to know about the text, the interpretative strategies, or the discussion process (Kuder, 2003; Stone, 1998, 2002). At the same time, teachers cannot simply teach and regulate the use of interpretative strategies; they must relinquish control of the strategies and the discussions in a developmentally responsive process based upon the emergent skills and knowledge of students (Wienczek & O'Flahavan, 1994). In short, in book discussions, there is an inherent tension between the need to retain control of classroom activity and, at the same time, transfer control of book discussions and interpretative strategies to students (O'Flahavan, Stein, Wienczek, & Marks, 1992).

Fourth, to actively participate in literature discussions, students must also develop the *ability to follow and respond to the prior speakers' utterances* by employing a combination of listening, speaking, and communication strategies. When discussions go well, they involve coherent talk in the same way that Applebee (1996) suggests that curriculum is conversational, in that students discover "interrelationships that ... echo back on one another" providing "not only new contexts for exploring or redefining the established topic, but new perspectives on other elements in the conversation, and on the topic itself" (p. 76-77). Good discussions, therefore, have a coherent, recursive, and reciprocal pattern of initiating and responding to utterances that promote the deeper involvement of speakers in meaning-construction activity.

There are two types of conversational coherence that students must acquire (Almasi, O'Flahaven, & Arya, 2001). *Intertopic coherence* involves the ability of speakers to select, introduce, and sequence old and new topics to smoothly and logically connect and transition between speakers and topics. *Intratopic coherence* allows speakers to provide depth to the discussion of particular topics by engaging in strategies such as recalling information from prior topics to enhance the current topic, using elaborations to demonstrate an individual's understanding or contribute to the telling of a story (Duran & Szymanski, 1995), providing evaluations that demonstrate effective management of the activity, drawing on personal experience, or making intertextual links to elaborate the discussion.

Difficulties of Students with Language and Learning Disabilities with Regard to Managing and Maintaining Coherent Conversations

Despite the emphasis on instructional conversations in the educational literature (Goldenberg, 1993), teachers and students with LLD face several dilemmas related to managing and maintaining coherent conversations.

Thus, in addition to the necessity of teaching and learning the interpretative strategies, basic conversational skills must be developed to overcome difficulties with group processes, topic initiation, and topic maintenance.

Problems with group processes. A major management issue concerns establishing communicative processes, which are crucial in sustaining effective conversations. For example, difficulties in turn taking encountered by students with LLD include getting the floor to take turns, giving turns to others, and using sophisticated conversational skills (e.g., avoiding interruptions and using simultaneous speech in judicious ways; Brinton & Fujiki, 1989; Tannen, 1984). Additionally, stepping into mutually constitutive and recursive roles associated with being the speaker and the listener in conversations is especially challenging for students with LLD, who tend to have trouble taking the "other" perspective in terms of anticipating speaker or audience needs regarding continuity and appropriate information (Roth, Spekman, & Fye, 1995).

Problems with topic initiation (intertopic coherence). A second issue in conversational management involves the skill of speakers in selecting, introducing, and sequencing topics. Participants may have trouble establishing a topic that is interesting to others in the group, or in initiating or signaling shifts in topics at appropriate times. Part of this may be due to difficulty with managing topic or speaker transitions, resulting in abrupt topic shifts and the failure to use strategies that sustain topics (Almasi et al., 2001). This ability is of particular consequence for students with LLD, who are less sensitive to the conversational needs of their partners (Spekman, 1981), and have difficulty signaling and adjusting their talk to the language levels of their speaking partners (Bryan & Pflaum, 1978; Kuder, 2003).

Problems with topic maintenance (intratopic coherence). Difficulties with topic maintenance include mishandling questions, failure to add new information to the topic, difficulty following the thread of conversation as topics are introduced, reluctance to give up a topic when appropriate, and failure to connect topics and utterances with previous ones (Almasi et al., 2001; Brinton & Fujiki, 1989; Sacks, 1992). Children with learning disabilities or specific language impairments typically display difficulties with these maintaining strategies compared to their general education peers (Brinton, Fujiki, & Powell, 1997; Mathinos, 1991), inasmuch as they tend to produce less complex sentences (Simms & Crump, 1983; Vogel, 1974), have word-retrieval problems (Wiig & Semel, 1975), fail to understand words with multiple meanings (Wiig & Semel, 1984), and elicit less elaborated responses from other speakers (Bryan, Donahue, Pearl, & Sturm, 1981). Such

difficulties in extending topics at the local level (words, sentences, and meanings) impact these students' participation in larger and less bounded segments of discourse that span multiple topics, ideas, and speakers.

Given such difficulties among students with LLD, teachers may avoid placing these students in literature discussions and conversations that are heavily dependent on verbal interaction. However, doing so may underestimate the extent to which these students can attain conversational skills, and worse, may deprive them of crucial opportunities for learning (Goldenberg, 1993; Wells & Wells, 1984). Several researchers have provided evidence that the participation of students with disabilities in book discussions can have powerful beneficial effects on students' interpretation of literature, comprehension, and communicative abilities (Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995; Morocco et al., 2001, 2002; Raphael et al., 1997).

Although there have been several qualitative studies with upper-elementary populations (Goatley et al., 1995; Morocco et al., 2001, 2002), few, if any, studies of literature discussions have included primary-grade children with language and learning disabilities. Their less sophisticated mastery of the language and social facets of communication coupled with difficulties in language processing and production can seriously affect the quality of their book discussions. Similarly, the role of the teacher in changing the traditional institutional discourse to allow for an alternative structure that is more empowering for students by supporting the participation of students with disabilities in book discussions has not been fully investigated.

The purpose of this descriptive investigation was to examine the development of students' discussion skills and the nature of the teacher's role in book discussions in an inclusion context with primary-grade students with and without disabilities. Of importance was the nature of the scaffolds that teachers provided, the nature of students' interactions during book discussions over time, and students' ability to maintain topical coherence. We examined the book discussions at two points: (a) midyear, when the teacher had recently initiated book discussions in her classroom; and (b) end of year when she felt more successful in achieving her goals for book discussions. We interviewed the teacher to provide an insider's perspective on the goals of the book discussions and her role in achieving her discussion goals.

Of primary interest in this research were three questions: (a) How did the teacher perceive and fashion her role in modeling, promoting, and scaffolding certain kinds of discourse, as well as supporting the development of conversational coherence (based on teacher interviews and transcriptions of discussions)? (b) To

what extent did primary-grade students with LLD develop the ability to engage in book discussions, as represented through their ability to manage group processes as well as to introduce, develop, and sustain topics (e.g., maintain intertopical and intratopical coherence)? and (c) How did the teacher and student roles, and the nature of book discussions, change over time?

METHOD

Participants

Located in an urban midwestern city, the participants were primary-grade students and their teacher in an elementary school (grades kindergarten through fifth grade) characterized by a high mobility rate and a large number of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Approximately 86% of the students attending the school received free or reduced-cost lunches. The 17 students who participated in the study were members of an inclusion class of about 30 students. Represented among the 17 participants were three grade levels and four ethnic groups. Eleven of the participants received special education services and/or were considered to be nonreaders by their teachers. The participants of the book discussion groups are described in Table 1.

The teacher in the study, Ms. Travis (pseudonyms are supplied for all participants), was an Anglo-American female who had taught for several years as a general education teacher. At the time of the study, she was teaming and coteaching with the special education teacher to provide instruction in a full-time, multi-age inclusion classroom. This meant that all primary-grade students (K-3) with disabilities were enrolled full-time in the classroom for the entire school day. Mrs. Travis, as well as the special education teacher, had participated for several years in the Literacy Environments for Accelerated Progress (LEAP) Project (Englert, 1998). The LEAP Project involved a longitudinal examination of how students with learning disabilities were apprenticed into reading and writing literacy through the teacher-researcher collaborations that supported these apprenticeships.

Book Discussions in the Classroom

Book discussions were a regular weekly feature of the participating classroom. The two discussions analyzed in this study took place in January and June. In January, the group discussed the book *Moongame* (Asch, 1984), and in June, *Two Bad Ants* (van Allsburg, 1988). Both books featured animals as main characters, but the themes differed. In *Moongame*, a character named "Little Bird" teaches another character, "Bear," to play hide-and-seek. Having learned the game, Bear tries to

Table 1
Book Discussion Participants

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Reading level ^a	Grade in school	Disability ^b	Speech services	Non-reader ^d
January book discussion							
Bobby	M	African-American	0.0	1	—	—	∅
Hernan	M	Hispanic	0.7	2	LD	—	—
Jason	M	Caucasian	4.1	1	—	—	—
Jay	M	Other	0.0	2	EMI	Yes	∅
Katie	F	African-American	1.2	2	LD	—	—
Larry	M	African-American	0.0	1	EMI	Yes	∅
Nick	M	African-American	0.0	1	HI	Yes	∅
Sharon	F	Caucasian	0.5	1	—	—	—
Tanya	F	African-American	0.0	1	EMI	—	∅
June book discussion							
Bobby	M	African-American	0.0	1	—	—	∅
Carl	M	African-American	—	1	—	—	—
Dean	M	African-American	—	1	LD	Yes	∅
Jason	M	Caucasian	4.1	1	—	—	—
Jay	M	Other	0.0	2	EMI	Yes	∅
Katie	F	African-American	1.2	2	LD	—	—
Larry	M	African-American	0.0	1	EMI	Yes	∅
Lee	M	Caucasian	0.0	1	LD	Yes	∅
Mike	M	Caucasian	0.0	K	LD	Yes	∅
Nola	F	African-American	—	1	—	—	—
Reggie	M	African-American	—	1	—	—	—
Rita	F	Caucasian	0.9	1	—	—	—
Tanya	F	African-American	0.0	1	EMI	—	∅
Tim	M	Caucasian	0.2	1	—	—	∅ RR

^a Grade equivalent scores, Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT), October (pretest). ^b LD = Learning Disabilities; EMI = Educable Mentally Impaired; HI = Hearing Impaired. State guidelines were followed in identifying students to receive special education services. LD determination was derived from clinical judgment based on consideration of basic psychological processes and ability-achievement discrepancy (no formula used in this state). ^c Students receiving related speech-language services. ^d Considered by the teacher to be a nonreader; RR = Reading Recovery.

play hide-and-seek with a personified moon, believing that the moon is hiding when it is obscured by clouds. In *Two Bad Ants*, the adventures of two ants inside a human's house are told from the point of view of the ants. Among these adventures, the ants fall into a "brown lake" (coffee) where they encounter some huge "crystals" (sugar) to take back to their queen.

These two book discussions were selected for analysis because the teacher considered them representative and typical of three teaching and learning concerns: (a) the frustrations she felt in trying to teach discussion skills to her students, (b) the discussion processes that characterized the students' interactions at the two time points, and (c) the students' behaviors and challenges in acquiring

ing discussion skills. As researchers, we were interested in these two discussions in order to examine differences in the nature of teacher and student participation over time as well as the changing participation of primary-grade special education students and the features that characterized their successful participation in book discussions.

Once a week the general and special education teachers divided the class into two groups, and each teacher held a separate discussion with one of the groups. The book discussions conducted by the general education teacher were selected for study because general education teachers typically feel unprepared to meet the needs of special education students included in their classes (Cook, 2002); however, this teacher seemed

flexible and open to accommodating low-achieving students.

To facilitate face-to-face interaction during the book discussions, Ms. Travis and the students sat in a circle on the floor. In addition, Ms. Travis suspended one ubiquitous social participation rule used in most reading lessons: students were not required to raise their hands to bid for speaking turns during the discussion phase. She wanted the discussions to have the “feel” of conversation.

Each book discussion was comprised of four phases. In the first phase, which took about 6 minutes in the January discussion, and 3 minutes in June, Ms. Travis reviewed with the students two important facets of discussion: (a) “Rules for a book discussion” (i.e., the

Figure 1. Teacher’s lists: “Rules for a book discussion” and “Things we can talk about.”

RULES FOR A BOOK DISCUSSION

Eyes on the person talking.
One person talk at a time.
Talk only about the book.
It is okay to disagree.

THINGS WE CAN TALK ABOUT

Title
Illustrations
Author
Author’s purpose
Characters
Setting of the story
Problem/solution
Feelings about the book and why
Actions and events
Fiction or nonfiction
Lessons in the story
Relating it to one’s own life
Linking it to other books
Favorite or least favorite character or part of the story
Evaluating the character.

social norms for participation and communication), and (b) "Some things we can talk about" (i.e., appropriate content topics and literary responses to texts). These corresponded, respectively, to "How to share" (rules) and "What to share" (things we can talk about) (Raphael & Goatley, 1997). The rules and social norms for discussion were displayed on a large poster chart placed near the discussion area (see Figure 1). Social norms included expectations related to making eye contact with a speaker, one person talking at a time, conversation confined to the book, and permission to agree or disagree.

Ms. Travis also displayed on a second poster the list of interpretative responses that she wished her students to employ during the discussion. Interpretative responses and topical content included: (a) text-based responses (e.g., discussion of the title, illustrations, characters, story setting, problem/solution, and actions and events); (b) reader-based responses (e.g., feelings about the book and why; favorite part of the story; relationship of the story to one's life); and (c) author-based responses (e.g., author, author's purpose, story genre [fiction or nonfiction], and theme or lessons in the story). The purpose of these reminders was to scaffold performance by making visible and accessible the language and strategies that might support students in making their responses to the text or other speakers.

The second phase, 4 and 8 minutes in January and June, respectively, involved the teacher orally reading the book. During this phase, students were expected to listen quietly as the teacher read the story aloud and showed the pictures. The teacher did not invite discussion or insert commentary while she read. If a student commented on the story during this phase, the teacher responded briefly but did not encourage further discussion.

The third phase involved the discussion of the story by the teacher and students. This phase, the longest, 15 minutes in January and 13 minutes in June, was the capstone of the lesson. In the two book discussions, the students and teacher collaboratively constructed the content of the discussion by initiating topics and taking speaking turns. The students initiated the focus, or topic, of the group's discussion 80% of the time, thus taking major responsibility for "what got talked about." The proportion of speaking turns taken by the teacher within these topics was about 40% in both book discussions, with the remainder of the speaking turns (60%) distributed among the students. Since two-thirds of classroom talk is typically produced by the teacher (Edwards & Mercer, 1987), the fact that teacher talk occurred only 40% of the turns seemed advantageous for this study of student participation.

In phase four, about 2 minutes in both January and June discussions, the teacher reviewed with students whether and to what extent the purposes of the book discussion had been met, specifically, which items of the "things we can talk about" had been covered and which were determined to be the focus of the next book discussion.

Data Analysis

There were two main sources of data: audiotaped teacher interviews and videotapes of the book discussions. First, to gather information about the teachers' goals and perceptions of the students in book discussions, the primary author conducted interviews with the teacher following the book discussions. In addition, during the analysis phase of the study, and in order to confirm our interpretation of events and teacher activities, the primary author held an audiotaped viewing session with the teacher. As she reviewed the videotapes, she commented on student performance and described her thoughts and actions at particular moments that she considered consequential in terms of responding to specific students or in cultivating specific discourse practices. These sessions were transcribed and searched for recurring themes or patterns regarding the teacher's intentions for the students' participation in the discussion.

Second, we used conversation analytical techniques with the book discussion transcripts to make visible the teacher's and students' participation. Applied conversation analysis (CA) is a suitable tool for researchers "who have a practical, moral, and/or political interest in the practices studied" (ten Have, 1998, p. 184) that goes beyond identifying structures and forms of conversation to discover what makes sense for "participants, locally, in their practical context" (p. 186). For us, the potential of applied conversation analysis lay in its use for practical purposes, that is, for (a) identifying the requirements and challenges of using new classroom conversation patterns, and (b) learning techniques for instructing young children to use new conversation patterns effectively. Accordingly, using conversation analysis, we identified and examined episodes of talk that characterized the book discussions in order to understand how the teacher and students managed both the group *processes* necessary for conversation and the conversational *content* with regard to topic initiation and topic maintenance strategies.

Several analyses were conducted to identify patterns of talk. First, each discussion phase was divided into segments of topical episodes (defined as all talk directly and tangentially related to a single topic and bounded by the conclusion of one topic and the introduction of a subsequent or new topic). Within each topical segment, three features were noted: who initiated the seg-

ment, the manner in which the segment was initiated, and whether the speaking turn for each topical segment was contingent upon prior conversation or conditionally developed by later speakers. Second, speaking turns were counted to determine the extent to which teachers and students took turns and how turns were concluded. Third, in order to better understand the role and types of teacher moves, the teacher's utterances were extracted from the transcripts, and discourse analyses were used to sort and classify them according to their content and function in the book discussions.

RESULTS

The following sections (a) explain and illustrate patterns of group process and topic management in the book discussions, and (b) examine features of the teacher's participation as she addressed the problems of teaching students how to manage their own discussions. First, we describe the teacher's goals and scaffolds based on teacher interview data; and second, we present the results of the conversational analysis of the two book discussions.

Teacher Goals and Scaffolds for Book Discussions

Goals for group processes. One of the challenges that primary-grade students face in holding discussions involves the need to use good communication skills to respond to prior speakers' utterances and conversational topics in the social context. Ms. Travis held this view about her young readers, and expressed this as one of her early book discussion goals. As she explained (teacher quotes are taken from recorded field notes and from the transcript of the videotaped viewing session):

They don't come to us with conversational skills. They don't come to us actually knowing how to give and take in a conversation, listen and respond, listen and respond ... You know, you can encounter a little child anywhere, and they'll just want to start talking to you, to tell you what they're doing and where they've been. These kids don't talk. They don't converse ... They don't ever have a conversation with their parents, per se, or any adult, not even an adult, any peer, where they can just talk.

Thus, Ms. Travis felt that one of her primary initial tasks was to support her young readers in developing the social and communicational skills associated with good conversation. Consequently, she emphasized the ground rules for engaging in classroom conversations, since she felt these were the foundation for building talk among speakers (Mercer, 1996). These communication skills had preeminence in her mind over the interpretative strategies, as she explained in an interview:

To me the (ground) rules are more important than the topics because I think the topics – eventually,

hopefully – will naturally come, but they need to keep their eyes on the person talking, and talk only about the book, so we're not off talking about *Goosebumps* from last night. And um, you know, one person talk at a time.

Goals for topic management: Cognitive content and intratopical coherence. A second goal of Ms. Travis was to develop her students' employment of the interpretative strategies and responses that characterize good discussion. Toward this end, she designed the visual scaffolds listed on the poster to remind students of the types of interpretative strategies that they might employ and the language they might use to initiate their responses to texts. From the beginning, she was aware that her students needed support to employ these interpretative strategies, and she used the poster to prompt their use of the strategies and the language of more expert readers (Baker, Gersten, & Scanlon, 2002).

A third goal of Ms. Travis was to develop students' ability to converse coherently; in other words, to listen and respond to each other's ideas and to articulate and justify positions and viewpoints, using evidence, explanations, and/or personal experience. Many times she told her students, "If that's what you think, then stand up there and tell me why. I'm not going to argue with you; I just want to know why." For Ms. Travis, defending a point of view meant giving reasons to explain why an individual held a particular position. As she explained in an interview:

The "why" part's the hardest part. "Why do you think that? Why do you feel that way? Tell me." So that's definitely a goal; trying to get them to be able to defend and to tell why they think something should be that way or why they disagree with something. And they don't do that very well to begin with.

Ms. Travis felt that students would benefit from learning to express themselves verbally, believing that communication is a lifelong skill. As she stated, "I think generally in life and as they get older, even in a school setting, they're going to have to be able to communicate their needs, their wants, and what they agree with and what they disagree with."

Analysis of the January Book Discussion

As mentioned, the teacher's intentions were to develop social and communication skills related to conversation. These intentions were further explicated and correlated to her teaching practices through our analysis of the January discussion. Both the teacher's discourse moves and the effects of these moves on students' participation were examined by evaluating the teacher and student roles in the discussion, the nature of the teacher's scaffolding and assistance, and the

students' facility in managing the communication processes and topical coherence processes.

Managing group processes. The examination of student talk revealed that students did not, initially, demonstrate mastery of the dialogic practices associated with good discussion (turn-taking, floor-holding) or the skills associated with effective conversation (eye contact, revoicing). Thus, the teacher's stated goals and her perceptions of students' difficulties corresponded to the observational evidence. In turn, our observations of the teacher revealed that many of her January responses focused on instructing students in the social requirements for participation, such as how students might address or listen to each other using appropriate verbal or nonverbal responses. In this respect, the teacher focused less on the content of students' utterances and more on the communicational obligations and dialogical relations required for successful participation.

An immediate problem to which the teacher attended was the students' difficulty with participating in a collaboratively developed discourse. In most language arts lessons, the teacher asks questions and students direct their answers to the teacher. However, in book discussions students are expected to direct their attention and remarks to peers rather than to the teacher, so this was an unfamiliar discourse practice. Ms. Travis attempted to bridge the gap between the speakers and listeners by gluing their utterances and responses into a common conversational thread of initiation and response. The following transcript excerpt illustrates a set of moves she typically used to instruct the speaker, in this case a student with LLD (all students with LLD are indicated in the transcripts by an asterisk), to first identify the appropriate audience and then directly communicate with them. (See Appendix for list of transcription conventions used.)

Katie*: The setting was outside.

T: Well, are you talking to me or are you talking to the group?

Katie*: The group.

T: Ok, then look at the group and tell the group.

In this segment, Ms. Travis mentored her students in appropriate conversational behavior by "literally walk[ing] them through what a discussion looks like; you know, ask that person, answer that person, what do you think, look at that person." She explicitly provided the metaknowledge and communicated the ground rules (e.g., look at the group, tell the group) that the student, Katie, might employ to engage in collaborative discourse. Important, too, the type of coaching the teacher supplied was provided in the situated context of students' interactions and responses rather than imparted in decontextualized settings that were remote

from the context of use. When the teacher did not provide these social supports, the topical floor ended abruptly, and students were not able to sustain the conversation or reflect on others' ideas. In this manner, she sought to apprentice her students into the responsibilities and behaviors of "speaker" and "listener," and positioned them in reciprocal communicational relationships with other group members. She tried to teach them how to talk (Daniels, 2001). In so doing, she strived to create a communicative context where conversational roles and social practices were understood by the participants, as well as supported and collaboratively developed by students.

Managing the topic. The teacher's second stated goal pertained to the selection of interpretative responses that might be employed to develop the topic. She taught her students the discourse of interpretative response – the *what we talk about*. There were three sources of topic selection in the January discussion: the teacher's list of posted topics as described above, the topics generated by students independent of the list, and teacher-selected topics.

Our analyses of the January discussion revealed that students tended to choose interpretative responses from the teacher's list. Thus, 13 of the 20 topics introduced in the January discussion, both teacher- and student-selected, were connected to the list of "things we can talk about." Of the 15 topics selected by students, 8 were from the poster (7 different topics; 1 topic was selected twice). Thus, 65% of student-initiated responses were influenced directly or indirectly by the teacher, whose ideas about what constituted "legitimate book talk" were represented in the posted list.

The posted list of interpretative responses supported students as they tried out new response strategies, suggesting its influence as a mediational tool that could be used to introduce students to new ways of responding and to help them enter the conversation. However, the "list of things we can talk about" served as a double-edged sword. Students' reliance on the list resulted in a conversation that seemed to flow as though students were simply addressing a list of questions. Thus, their discourse lacked intratopic and intertopic coherence. Ms. Travis expressed her frustration with this pattern when she said, "Sometimes I just feel like they're topic-hopping almost. Here – there; here – there. ... I don't feel that it's organized; I don't know if it should be organized."

The analysis supported her contention: Topics seemed to exhibit a linear pattern, moving from topic to topic without being sustained beyond a single speaker (Almasi et al., 2001). The following portion of the discussion shows four topics introduced in quick succession, the first three drawn from the teacher's list

of topics (topics are bolded):

Katie*: Um, that's that's like Little Bear couldn't get to the moon, but Little, the other book was Little Bear get to, getting to the moon. This book he's trying to find the moon.

T: Good job. I like how **you compared that**.

Hernan*: Who was one of the authors, Ms. Travis?

T: Pardon me?

Hernan*: Who was one of the authors?

T: Frank Asch.

Jason: Um **I liked the part** / when he didn't find / when the moon was um hiding from the big cloud.

Sharon: How does the bear know how, how does the bird know how to **play hide and go seek**?

This segment of discourse illustrates the conundrum created by the scaffold. On the one hand, two of the three students (Katie, Hernan) who relied on the posted interpretative responses were students with LLD, suggesting the potential value of the poster as a scaffold that allowed less proficient readers to participate in book conversations. On the other hand, the discussion sounded lifeless, with none of the topics contingently related or elicited by the previous speaker's ideas, and no utterances followed up by other speakers. As the teacher had suggested in her interview, the lack of topical depth suggested that young students had difficulty sustaining topics or employing transitions to signal the connections among topics. Students had difficulty initiating and regulating the discussion topics, and the burden fell to the teacher to manage and sustain the discussion.

Coherence within topics. Coherent talk must occur from speaker to speaker; that is, conversation should be dependent on a prior speakers' utterances and echo or build upon what topics and ideas came before and what succeeds them (Burbules, 1993). This entails intratopic coherence as speakers sustain particular topics through elaborations, questions, and reflections. The teacher was concerned that the students learn:

the appropriate way to have a discussion, ... not to stop after one thought, go to something new, stop after one thought, go to something new ... You don't go up to somebody and say, "I watched it on TV," and then don't tell them why you watched it or what you liked about it. I mean, conversations involve a little bit more than just one quick sentence.

One way we measured talk was by counting the number of speaking turns per topic. Student and teacher number of turns and proportions of the book discussion talk were similar for both January and June; therefore, for efficiency, we will report student data. In January

there were 113 student speaking turns, 20 topic changes, and 17 unique topics (excluding recurring topics). With the exception of the longest topic discussed below, each topic averaged 4.8 student turns per topic before the topic shifted. This indicates that most topics remained undeveloped (see transcript segment above).

However, the following transcript segment, from the same discussion, provides a notable exception, because it contains 22 turns on the same topic, the most turns related to any topic in the January discussion. We include this exception in order to demonstrate the emerging, but imperfect, attempts of students to engage in coherent and connected conversation. The children's revoicing of the words "moon" and "clouds" (indicated by underlining and double underlining) suggests that they attempted to extend the prior speaker's conversational intent.

Sharon: Is the moon the king? That's why the um clouds went over?

T: Say that again. I didn't hear you.

Sharon: Is the moon the king?

T: The king? Do you mean

Sharon: Yeah.

T: ... Is the moon the king? What do you mean when you say, is the moon the king?

Sharon: Because it's the clouds [inaudible] the moon

T: I'm not understanding what you mean.

Sharon: The clouds went over the moon [inaudible]

Katie*: The wind blew the clouds over the moon.

Tanya*: The clouds

Hernan*: Maybe the clouds

Tanya*: The clouds / the clouds / the clouds covered up the moon.

Hernan*: Maybe the clouds moved.

Sharon: It was no clouds when the / when the moon was out.

T: So what happened?

Hernan*: (points and says something inaudible)

Sharon: Maybe they just come to cover the moon up.

T: That might be. What do you think, Larry. / Do you think the clouds just came to cover up the moon? (Larry* nods.)

T: Yeah? Do you think anything different?//

Larry*: The clouds cover up the moon so the bear can sit still.

T (nods): Yeah, good.

When Sharon initiated the topic by stating that the "clouds went over the moon," the next set of speakers (Katie, Tanya, Hernan) thought aloud about how the moon became covered with clouds. The development of

Figure 2. Development of meaning in exploratory and contingent talk in January.

STUDENT	AGENT	TOPIC	ACTION	OBJECT	CAUSE-EFFECT
Sharon		[clouds]		[Moon]	
Sharon		clouds	[went over]	moon	
Katie	[wind blew]	clouds	over	moon	
Tanya		clouds	[covered up]	the moon	
Hernan		The clouds	[moved]		
Sharon		No clouds		[when] Moon was out	
Larry		Clouds	cover	moon	so the bear can sit still

this topic is represented in Figure 2. Katie hypothesized that the wind blew the clouds over the moon. Two successive speakers (Tanya and Hernan) revoiced and rephrased this concept using different terms (The clouds “covered up the moon,” and “the clouds moved”). The fact that students revoiced and rephrased prior speakers’ ideas in slightly elaborative ways suggested that these young readers were drawing upon the words of other speakers as a cognitive resource to deepen their involvement and to develop a more in-depth understanding of the text ideas (Gutierrez & Stone, 1997).

During this segment, the group’s talk sounds exploratory as the young readers hesitate, falter, and work at the outer limits of their knowledge to make sense of the text and their experience. This is apparent in the hesitations in their speech (indicated by slash marks), and by speakers’ self-repetitions (e.g., “The clouds / the clouds / The clouds covered up the moon”). Interestingly, the students who took the greatest advantage of the opportunity to participate in this exploratory talk were the students with LLD, as suggested by the fact that four of the five participants in this longest segment of contingent talk were special education students. It is possible that the discussion format privileged students who needed to explore meaning in relation to their world experience in a tentative fashion. If so, participation in a discussion group might have cognitive and linguistic consequences for students with disabilities, offering them a discursive space for engaging in thought and meaning making processes.

Nevertheless, this single example of contingent talk seemed difficult to interpret in its direction, was not cued by a previous topic, and ended rather abruptly when the teacher, after a short pause, introduced an entirely new topic of conversation. In fact, the teacher seemed uncertain as to how to support the deeper conceptual understanding of her students or how to link their ideas to the story events and theme. Overall, the dialogue did not seem adequately developed or sustained in its movement toward a mutual understanding or agreement (Burbules, 1993).

Maintaining a topic by providing support for opinions and responses based on personal experience and use of text (Almasi et al., 2001) is an attribute of skillful conversation and represents a more critical literary discourse. Our analyses of the teacher’s talk revealed that she actively coached her students in how they might support their own opinions and those of others by requesting that points of views be supported or buttressed with evidence and explanations. To accomplish this goal, Ms. Travis used questions to animate her young readers into more active respondent positions, inviting them to challenge or seek support for the ideas of prior speakers. The following exchange is an example of an instructional interaction where Ms. Travis modeled how to request that speakers explain their reasoning, and then prompted students to ask the prior speaker to offer evidence for their opinions (see underlined prompts).

Sharon: The book is not real.
 T: Does anyone want to know why Sharon thinks the book's not real?
 Ss: Why? Why, Sharon?
 Sharon: Because / uh / the moon wouldn't hide behind a cloud.
 T: Anybody want to know why she thinks that?
 Ss: Why?
 Hernan*: Why do you think that, Sharon?
 Sharon: 'Cuz (looking at the teacher)
 T: Are you talking to me or to everybody here?
 Sharon: (Looks towards the group) 'Cuz the moon / doesn't really have clouds and the moon has (inaudible).

This segment shows the apprenticeship that the teacher provided in extending the topic by requesting warrants and explanations. When there was no immediate response or uptake on Sharon's topic, Ms. Travis prompted students to request a reason for Sharon's position, thereby apprenticing her students in the reciprocal communicative and reasoning moves that audience members use to extend the topics and ideas of other speakers. In so doing, the teacher animated her students as position holders and respondents in a dialectical relationship with other speakers. Consequently, Hernan used the explicit speech turn modeled by the teacher to ask a question of his peers (e.g., "Why do you think that, Sharon?"). In this manner, Ms. Travis modeled and assisted her students in the rhetorical moves that could be used to achieve understanding, agreement, elaborations, and consensus (Pontecorvo & Sterponi, 2002). This move also prompted students to treat other speakers' ideas as objects worthy of expansion, contemplation, reflection, and disagreement (Wells, 1999). This formed an important basis for guiding students' participation into a more critical discourse leading to reasoning and argumentation.

Scaffolded Mediation of the Involvement of Students with Disabilities

Finally, of special interest was the nature of the scaffolding Ms. Travis provided specifically to support students with LLD. In the example above, some students literally imported Ms. Travis' utterances as they ventriloquated through her words to participate in the discussion (Wertsch, 1991). However, other students with LLD offered a greater challenge to Ms. Travis' efforts to include them in the conversation. For these less active or successful students, Ms. Travis provided more detailed language structures. For example, she invited Tanya, a student with LLD, into the conversation by asking her direct questions.

T: Tanya, I'm thinking about that same question that Sharon just asked, and

Katie answered. Sharon wondered why did the cloud go over the moon, and Katie said the wind blew it over. What do you think?//

Tanya*: The clouds
 Hernan*: Maybe the clouds
 T: Just a minute, I want to hear what Tanya's saying. / One person at a time.
 Tanya*: The clouds / the clouds / the clouds covered up the moon.
 T: OK. Do you think the wind blew the clouds to cover up the moon? (Tanya nods).

In this segment, Ms. Travis positioned Tanya to become a more active player in the dialogue by asking her to comment on Katie's suggestion. While waiting for Tanya to formulate her response, Ms. Travis protected Tanya's conversational space from Hernan, who attempted to usurp the floor before Tanya, a slow responder, had completed her thought. Tanya's eventual response was a simple revoicing, but it was significant insofar as Ms. Travis had managed to secure her participation. When Tanya did not directly address the group's speculation as to what agent might have caused the clouds to cover the moon, Ms. Travis offered Tanya a possible repair, "Do you think the wind blew the clouds?," which Tanya accepted with a nod.

In the following exchange, Ms. Travis further helped Tanya extend her response.

T: Tanya, have you ever played hide-and-go-peek?
 Tanya*: [inaudible]
 T: Like the bear did here?
 Tanya*: [inaudible]
 T: Who did you play hide-and-go-peek with?
 Tanya*: My brother and Shehan.

This segment illustrated a strategy that Ms. Travis used to secure and scaffold the participation of students with LLD. She asked a direct question about personal experience (e.g., "Have you ever played hide-and-go-peek?" "Who did you play ... with?"). Often when students had difficulty entering the discussion successfully, the teacher found ways to connect the story to their personal lives and experiences, providing them an immediate opportunity to become more active participants in the discussion.

Jay, another special education student, provided an even greater challenge. Ms. Travis described Jay's participation as follows:

Jay has a tendency just to comment, just to comment. He repeats what you say, or if he has a thought, he may comment on that thought, but not really... Just keeping him on track, keeping him focused. It's always a major goal with Jay... We

were trying to get him to talk, so any time he would utter anything, we'd jump on it and ask him to repeat it.

The following transcript segment illustrates Ms. Travis's technique for involving Jay in the conversation.

Student: Mama bears, baby cubs/

Jay*: Mama bears.

T: What do you think, Jay? / What did you say?

Jay*: The little bear couldn't find the moon.

T: Did the little bear find the moon?

Jay*: The moon behind the clouds (inaudible).

In the above segment, the topic under discussion was whether the story was make-believe or real. Ms. Travis immediately responded to Jay's mumbled repetition of another student's comment, "Mama bears," by asking him to restate his ideas ("What do you think, Jay? What did you say?"). Realizing his difficulty in entering the discussion, Ms. Travis accepted Jay's offered response as an appropriate bid for a turn, and gave it further recognition in the discussion. In the following sequence, Ms. Travis initiated a new topic by asking Jay two direct questions, beginning with an eliciting question to seek his opinion of the book.

T: Um, / Jay, I'm wondering. Did you like the book? Did you like the book, Jay? // Yeah? How come, how, what made you like this book?

Jay*: The book is // (inaudible) //

T: The book is what?

Jay*: (inaudible, something about the color green, dark green)

T: You liked the color dark green in the book?

Jay*: Yeah.

As with Tanya, Ms. Travis shaped Jay's ambiguous comment into an appropriate response. She created space for Jay to participate, and then transformed and fleshed out the kernel of his ideas into more fully formed and legitimated responses. Ms. Travis understood that participation was the first step on the road to deeper involvement and learning by students with disabilities. She accepted Jay's participation at the point where he was able to start, and found ways to reconnect his ideas to the discussion. As she explained:

I think, in a way, he wants to be in on [the conversation], he doesn't know how. ... There was an appropriate [way] to raise your hand or get into the conversation. ... He doesn't have the appropriate skills to get in there, but his commenting allows his voice to just come out.

In this manner, the teacher demonstrated how to create and sustain a dialogical relationship by offering scaffolded interactions that allowed students to fulfill some

of the moves of a reciprocal dialogue between speakers and audience members. The teacher provided the linguistic, cognitive, and social facets that students needed to participate, but that were beyond their immediate competence. Through a complementary process, therefore, of guided participation (e.g., teacher-assisted participation) and participatory appropriation (e.g., students' appropriation of some forms of talk, scaffolds or practices) (Rogoff, 1993), the teacher and students were both participating in a "joint cultural activity rather than merely observing or reacting to each other" (Stone, 1998, p. 351).

These examples illustrate that the nature of the teacher's instruction extended beyond the construction of simple speaker-audience relationships. Ms. Travis created participant structures that opened the floor to students to challenge or interact directly with each other's ideas (Reid, 1998). For instance, when she said to a student, "Katie said the wind blew it over. What do you think?," Ms. Travis animated both Katie and the other student as position holders – people who can hold similar or different positions. Similarly, by voicing a particular student's opinions, she invited other students to place themselves in possible alignment or opposition to those views (O'Connor & Michaels, 1993). Through these instructional moves, Ms. Travis put her students with disabilities in more powerful roles associated with critical thinkers and debaters, and prompted them to present their positions, offer evidentiary support, or challenge suppositions. This type of tactical positioning was especially used to foster the participation of students who participated less frequently. In these cases, the teacher called upon specific students by name to relate the text to personal experience or to respond to another speaker's ideas (e.g., "What do you think, Larry. Do you think the clouds just came to cover up the moon?"). As O'Connor and Michaels (1996) have suggested, Ms. Travis used her teacher authority to make it possible for voices to be expressed or heard that might not be otherwise, and for assertions to be challenged or expanded in the supported participation structure.

The June Book Discussion

By June, Ms. Travis, at the suggestion of another teacher in the research project, had discontinued using the poster of interpretative responses. She described why this seemed a good move in helping students develop coherent conversations: "It was almost like a cheater list. ... Now they have to just think on their own." Stone (1998, 2002) has highlighted the temporary nature of effective scaffolds, arguing that an important condition of effective implementation is that scaffolds be dismantled when students demonstrate their growing competence. Likewise, the teacher felt

Figure 3. Development of meaning in exploratory and contingent talk in June.

STUDENT	AGENT	TOPIC	ACTION or DESCRIPTOR	OBJECT	EVIDENCE
Katie	[<u>ants</u> think]	crystals sugar	are sugar is crystals		interpretation
Dean		[crystals]	[are] stone		
Nola		[crystals]	are sweet		practical knowledge (implied)
Katie	that <u>guy</u>	[crystals]	putting in coffee/tea		supporting details from text
Teacher	<u>nobody</u> mentioned how do we know <u>they</u> [who?] said	coffee coffee/tea [coffee/tea]	brown lake		
Katie		coffee/tea	brown in a cup		practical knowledge & details from text
Dean		brown lake	no such thing		practical knowledge
Lee	<u>they</u> [ants] thought	brown lake			interpretation
Dean		brown lake	no such thing lakes are blue		practical knowledge practical knowledge
Lee	this book		reminds	me of movie	[scaffold/list]
Dean	character[?]	crystals			supporting details from text[?] [unclear]
Rita	I saw	crystals (stone)	[not]	[the word] "sugar"	supporting details from text
Dean	ants	crystals	eat	them	(reasoning unclear)
Lee	[I never knew] <u>ants</u>	liked	sugar		revisiting knowledge assumptions
Katie	<u>ants</u>	crystals	not be able to eat	them	practical knowledge

that her students had outgrown the scaffolds, and their continued presence hindered her students' development and independence. With the removal of the poster in June, only one third of the identified topics directly reflected the teacher's poster list, while the remaining two-thirds were self-generated by students.

Analysis of the June Book Discussion

We will now look at the same elements – managing group processes, managing the topic, coherence within topics, and involvement of students with disabilities – as they appeared six months later in the June book discussion.

Managing group processes. In the June discussion, guiding students in the social processes related to participating in conversations and discussions seemed to be of less concern to Ms. Travis than it had been earlier. The occurrence of simultaneous speech and interruptions became a greater concern, particularly during an animated discussion of whether or not the crystals in the story were, in fact, stones or sugar. While simultaneous speech need not be disruptive to discussion (Brinton & Fujiki, 1989), Ms. Travis repeatedly called students' attention to the need for speaking one person at a time.

The following segment illustrates how several students talked over other speakers to advance their positions. (Overlapping talk is indicated by use of brackets.)

Dean*: But it's not sugar. It's stones.
{
Katie*: Um, page four??? Page four and five???
{
Group: Na-unh.
That's shu [Several voices overlap to say
the same thing.]
{
T: Just a minute, please. You've
?: That's stones.
{
T: got too many people talking at one time.
Lee*: Um.
T: Just a minute please, you have too many
people talking at one time. Dean does
not think it's sugar.

In this segment, Ms. Travis assumed a managerial role, stepping in to police students' overlapping talk and to handle the conversational flow. It is understandable that Ms. Travis felt compelled to manage the conversational flow so that all speakers would have a chance to be heard. However, contrasted with the tenor of the January discussion, what prompted this response is a positive development. That is, students participated spontaneously in the conversation without waiting to

be called upon, often blurring the distinction between their own utterance and that of the preceding speaker. As opposed to a more traditional teacher-controlled lesson format, it was apparent that students had begun to take increasing ownership of the activity and their participation. Their willingness to argue and disagree showed that they were thinking more deeply about the topics in highly personal and engaging ways. In fact, Burbules (1993) argued that skillful dialogue is represented by participants who get "caught up" in good dialogues that "carry away" their participants in an interaction that takes a force and direction of its own. Using Burbules' definition as a criterion, the case may be made that effective dialogue was absent from the January discussion, but was highly present in the synergistic and absorbing encounters that carried away the June participants.

Managing the topic. Topic introduction and sequencing had also grown less linear in June. Thus, topics were introduced, linked, embedded, or modified in a shifting panorama of ideas or themes (Almasi et al., 2001). In the January discussion, 20 topics were introduced in 15 minutes, an average of 45 seconds of attention per topic. In June, there were 114 student speaking turns, 17 topic changes, and 9 unique topics. Each topic averaged 6.7 student turns before the topic shifted, but 12.7 turns per actual topic, suggesting deeper development of topical content. This was an increase over January of nearly 8 more turns per topic, representing a nearly 200% improvement in topic density. The topic that recurred most frequently concerned the nature of the crystals in the story (discussed below), which consumed over 60% of the discussion time.

The manner of topic introduction was also different. In January, topics seemed to be "announced" by students and lacked connection to what came before. In June, the boundaries between topics were often blurred, and it was sometimes difficult to determine the moment when a new topic was introduced. In fact, two of the students' topics were characterized by multiple and recursive linkages and elaborations; that is, several students introduced and returned to the topics after the conversation had moved on to other topics. They brokered the topics that were important to them and maintained the group's attention to those topics. Instead of pursuing many different topical options without particular depth or involvement, the students sustained the conversation to develop their interests and questions, even ignoring off-topic comments and efforts to subvert the topic of interest. In short, whereas the teacher orchestrated the conversation in January, by June, the students had become highly invested in the conversation and had assumed greater regulatory control of what got talked about and by whom.

Coherence within topics. Intratopic coherence was also more developed in June. Although phase three, the discussion phase, was 13 minutes long, one topic filled 8 minutes of that time. The topic that held the interest of the group for so long was a debate over whether or not the crystals referred to in the story represented stones or sugar. One student was convinced the crystals were made of stone, while others just as determinedly argued the crystals were, in fact, sugar. We will characterize intratopic coherence during the June discussion using the following 8-minute segment. Although the entire 8-minute transcript is too long to reproduce here, the segments below, presented together to retain a sense of the “flow” of the conversation, represent the essence of the discussion and illustrations of intratopic coherence.

Rita: The crystals were sugar.
 T: Hm. Crystals were sugar. Does somebody agree with Rita or do you disagree? What do you think?
 .
 .
 .
 Dean: They're stone.
 Katie*: They ARE sugar, and they think that they're crystals.
 Dean: No, stone.
 T: How do you know, though?
 Nola: Because, because they're sweet.
 Katie*: Because that guy was puttin' 'em in his coffee.
 T: Because what?
 Katie*: 'Cause that guy was puttin' 'em in his coffee or tea.
 T: Nobody mentioned coffee.
 Rita: Well, um, I watched it on the *Magic School Bus*.
 T: ... Let's think about the book. How do we know if you said that he put it in his coffee or his tea? They said it was a brown lake.
 Katie*: Coffee and tea are brown, and it's in a cup.
 Dean*: A brown, there ain't a brown, there ain't no such thing 'n a brown lake.
 Lee*: They thought um it was a brown lake, only,
 T: Well, let's go back to our book discussion rule of one person talking at a time. I heard three or four of you right there, and it's hard to unders[stand].
 Dean*: There's no such thing as,
 T: Dean, you're talking while I'm talking. Just give it a second. We need one per-

son at a time so we can all hear your ideas.

Dean*: There's no such thing 'n no brown lake. [inaudible] a lake it blue.
 Lee*: Um, um, this book reminds me of um this one movie // I can't remember the name of it //
 Dean*: The character could have made that he probably was thinking about ants was in / ants was outside and it made a big hole in the cream it was in a hole in a in a drink and don' go in his house and bring crystals to the queen ant.
 Rita: It's not, they're not uh crystals because I a saw a when the other ants were leaving
 .
 .
 .
 T: Let's look at that picture that Rita's talking about.
 Rita: [Leaning forward into the circle toward the teacher and looking at the book.] That's right.
 T: Right here, Rita?
 Katie*: How do you know it said sugar ??? doesn't have all the words?
 T: It doesn't have all the letters, but I think what Rita saying is kind of interesting.
 Rita: 'Cause it says 'gr.'
 T: [Sit back] so everybody can see. I'll hold it up.
 Rita: It says 'gr.'
 T: What Rita's noticing when the two ants were hiding is that she saw the end of the word 'sugar.' What made you think this was sugar then?
 Rita: 'Gr' because it gots 'gr.'
 .
 .
 .
 Katie*: They were stone. The ants wouldn't be able to bite them, because stone is too hard.
 Gr: [Overlapping voices]
 T: Sssh. Stop please.
 Dean*: 'Cause sugar little tiny and is and is not shaped like that. And those is kind of big. I think those.
 T: Let's reread. Do you think it would be helpful if we reread? Because Katie thinks ... if it was a stone the ants couldn't eat it. Dean thinks it's a stone because of the way that it's shaped. Listen, and let's see if it helps us at all.

Wells (1999) suggests that statements such as “Are you agreeing or disagreeing?” help students learn about discourse by providing an apprenticeship into a particular type of speech register. Ms. Travis’ first question to the group: “Does somebody agree with Rita or do you disagree? What do you think?” established Rita’s utterances as material for debate, a situation that encouraged critical reflection and evaluation by peers. Two responses came immediately. Dean disagreed, “They’re stone,” but Katie supported Rita: “They are sugar, and they think they are crystals.” While the teacher had to prompt and animate students as position holders in January, in the June discussion the students were more independent in initiating and communicating their positions relative to other speakers in the sugar versus stone debate.

The students also demonstrated a growing ability to employ interpretative strategies to maintain the topic coherence. In offering evidence in support of their opinions in the controversy, Katie’s reference to the coffee or tea alluded to by the pictures in the story was an example of text-based evidence; she expanded on this idea by linking it to her prior knowledge, “Coffee and tea are in a cup” (Duran & Szymanski, 1995). Further, Rita drew an intertextual link to support her argument, “I watched it on the *Magic School Bus*.” In this manner, students were beginning to employ the multiple sources of evidence that supported and validated their opinions, a process that had been prompted by the teacher in the January discussion.

The discussion regarding the alphabet letters “G” and “R” represented another elaboration of the crystal/stone debate. Katie’s teacher-like question (“How do you know?”) might be seen as a peer evaluation or information gathering. In either case, her question paralleled the request for evidentiary knowledge that the teacher had modeled in January. Its emergence in Katie’s talk suggests the students had begun to acquire and execute the cognitive and linguistic facets supported by the teacher in prior conversations. By fulfilling these rhetorical moves, students had begun to extend the conversation by stepping into a scaffolding relationship with their peers as potential coaches and facilitators who could prompt and extend the thinking of their peers through questions and requests. They were applying the technical tools previously introduced by the teacher as intellectual devices for influencing the minds and behaviors of others (Daniels, 2001). What is remarkable is that Katie, a student with LLD, who had to be instructed in how to talk in January, by June was extending the talk of others by requesting clarification and by scaffolding their participation in a progressive discourse about meaning. In turn, Rita was prompted by Katie to use the text to support her contention that the crystals were

sugar. She offered the explanation that the book contained a picture with part of the word “sugar” exposed – specifically “gar” – and her personal experience of phonics, in conjunction with her earlier reasoning, likely suggested to her that the word might be “sugar.”

This segment suggests students’ growing authority over the conversation, including the speakers and the flow of topics. Students independently preserved intratopical coherence, as indicated by their conversations and hypotheses about the “brown substance.” When the teacher tried to interrupt their conversation to remind them about the rule of one speaker talking at a time, she herself was interrupted by Dean, who attempted to resume the conversation about the “brown lake.” Later, Lee also tried to change the topic, but Dean and the other students effectively moved to sustain the conversation about the crystals. In fact, Rita, Katie, and Dean were so intent on convincing each other of the viability of their points of view and arguments that they continued their conversation as though they had not been interrupted by Lee. Unlike in January, students continued their conversation without the teacher’s intervention, and even more telling, in spite of the teacher’s intervention.

Personal experience was one type of interpretative response that was self-initiated and applied by students to support their opinions and discussion. However, Ms. Travis continued to try to shape and scaffold their understanding of the other interpretative strategies as tools for sense-making. At one point, the teacher directed students’ attention to the additional evidence offered by the text to clarify their understanding of a crucial point in the story (e.g., what were the ants taking back to the queen ant). Once the group members considered the evidence from the story – “We can stay here and *eat this tiny treasure* every day forever” – even Dean, the dissenter, conceded the point that the crystals might be sugar. Had the teacher not encouraged the use of this interpretative response as part of the problem-solving process, the students might never have clearly understood the story, experienced closure to the controversy, or, worse, begun a competition of “Is, too!”/“Is, not!” or lost focus altogether.

In conversational discourse, it is not enough simply to take a position; an interlocutor must be able to support the point of view and to employ some kind of criteria in evaluating the positions taken by others. The June discussion differed from the January discussion in terms of the provision of evidence and interpretations and the sharper alignments and oppositions drawn by students, as shown in the analysis of the talk in Figure 3. Indeed, more complex social, linguistic and cognitive facets had begun to appear (see Figure 1). By using students’ assertions as opportunities for the teacher to

model and scaffold how to provide evidence, particularly the use of text to validate or illustrate a claim, Ms. Travis worked students' thinking toward the type of evidence-based responses and warrants that characterize a more critical discourse. In addition to the above occurrence, she referenced the text on several other occasions during this discussion.

- T: Let's look at that picture that Rita's talking about.
* * *
- T: Okay. Was there any part of the book that helped you decide that?
* * *
- T: I've been wondering as I was reading, and as I'm looking at these pictures. Do you think this story is real or make believe?

This segment suggests that Ms. Travis had become more skillful in scaffolding students' assertions. She referred students to the text as an important source of evidence, bringing in the text as a "voice" in the discussion. She seems to have increased her ability to "[align] students ... with the content of the academic work while simultaneously socializing them into particular ways of speaking and thinking" (O'Connor & Michaels, 1996, p. 65). She was helping them consider texts as tools of thought and as a means of expressing, transforming and elaborating on their own ideas (Daniels, 2001).

Extent of Involvement of Students with Disabilities

What was especially notable about both book discussions was the intense involvement of special education students in regulating and influencing the conversation. In January, all of the students in the group who were identified as special education students ($N=6$) participated at some level. Four (66%) both initiated topic changes and spoke voluntarily in the general discussion. By June, the number of special education students in the group had increased ($N=7$), 6 of whom (86%) participated in some way in the discussion. Three both initiated topics and voluntarily contributed to the general discussion (43% of the special education students in the group), compared with 2 general education students (29% of the general education students in the group). Thus, students who might be expected to be more passive and unengaged in group activity were implicated in every aspect of the conversation.

Examination of the specific moves of special education students suggested they were becoming successful in implementing the specific linguistic, communicative, cognitive, metacognitive, and social aspects of good discussions. For example, they were listening and

responding to each other, as suggested by Katie's evaluation of Rita's contention ("How do you know it said sugar?"), as well as by the contingent interactions of Katie, Dean, and Lee (see above). These students revoiced concepts and ideas (e.g., crystals, brown lake) from speaker to speaker, and used their practical prior knowledge to support the negotiation of meaning (e.g., Dean made the case that "A lake is blue"; and Katie stated that "Coffee and tea are brown, and it's in a cup"). These types of communicative moves were beyond the competence levels of most students with LLD in the January discussion.

In addition to initiating topics and responding to peers, the special education students also took positions and offered support or reasons for holding those positions. Two of the students who exerted the greatest authority over the management of the discussion and students' participation in it were Dean and Katie, two students with LLD. For example, the crystal controversy was initiated and sustained by Dean. However, Katie was equally strong in opposing Dean's opinion, and provided supported reasoning for her view. Katie expertly based her argument on perspective ("They think that they're crystals"), everyday experience ("Because that guy was puttin' 'em in his coffee"), and scientific knowledge ("If they were crystals, the ants wouldn't be able to eat 'em"). Students with LLD had grown increasingly successful in taking positions, aligning themselves with other speakers and ideas, and supporting their opinions with evidence and reasons.

DISCUSSION

Literacy is the masterful control of secondary discourses (e.g., the discourses of socially sanctioned institutions, like schools), including the pragmatics of social interaction. Teaching is the process of language socialization, socialization that is directed to bringing children into school-based intellectual practices manifested in mature ways of talking and interacting (O'Connor & Michaels, 1996). In the best of all worlds, special education would provide students with disabilities alternative ways to participate in those discourses, allowing them to experience a greater degree of success and to move them toward full participation in the community's practices. Accordingly, teaching practices should be adapted to meet the needs of these students so that they can master at least some of the "discourse practices, tools, and beliefs valued by the general education community" (Forman & McCormick, 1995, p. 154). The goal is to create discursive spaces for the previously silenced (Reid, Robinson & Bunsen, 1995) and to build an understanding of students' knowledge from the students' point of view rather than from the

teacher's own culture or from the official school culture (Wansart, 1995). For all teachers, the challenge is to enable students to participate in a range of conversations, and especially, to promote the opportunity for students to hold positions of expertise within the group (Gergen, 1995).

The Benefits and Challenges of Book Discussions

Book discussions are beneficial for developing crucial literacy and social skills. However, providing these benefits for students presents teachers with particular challenges in equipping and positioning students to manage their own learning.

Benefits for students. Book discussions constitute conversational opportunities (Goatley et al., 1995; McMahon & Raphael, 1997a; Raphael, 1994) and offer literacy spaces where students with disabilities can become active thinkers and participants in a critical discourse. Even in the primary grades, it was possible for students with LLD to develop their linguistic, cognitive, social and communicative abilities within social interactions and conversations about books. From a cognitive perspective, book discussions seemed to allow students to develop and display their intellectual capacities in ways that differed from typically favored conventional representations of verbal ability, reading fluency, and achievement (Gardner, 1985). Divergent thought and critical literacy could be modeled and practiced, allowing students with disabilities to express their perspectives in book discussions, as well as to communicate their experiences and voices in ways that could be listened to by others and that might blur the distinctions between those who were "disabled" and those who were "nondisabled." Through the transformation of their participation in the discourse, students with LLD had improved their aptitude to share ideas, respond to others, and assume responsibility for their own thinking (McMahon & Raphael, 1997b).

An especially striking result of this study was the extent to which many students with disabilities stepped into positions of power and authority. Far from being passive players in the discourse, students with disabilities had become passionately involved in its construction and negotiation. The fact that they assumed roles associated with leadership and self-agency suggests the potential of book discussion formats for creating enabling constructs of ability that challenge conceptions of disability. For these reasons, book discussions should be considered as a vehicle for reinventing the roles of learners with disabilities in inclusion contexts. Changing the nature of participation through book discussions seemed to offer a space for less proficient learners to develop academic competence, to expand their range of roles and mastery of interactional acts

(Gutierrez & Stone, 1997). Transforming the structure of the social practices of the activity allowed more opportunities for students to gain entry into roles that allowed them to serve as competent learners, leaders, and discursive agents (Gutierrez & Stone). Finally, the participation structure seemed to further the self-regulation and metacognitive abilities of students with disabilities, areas of known difficulty in literacy (Deshler, Schumaker, Lenz, & Ellis, 1984a, 1984b; Wong, 1980; Wong & Wilson, 1984; Wong, Wong, & Blenkinsop, 1989).

In addition, the study suggested that students with disabilities developed in the language and cognitive areas in which they had seemed to be deficient or passive. They displayed an increasing ability to coordinate topics and to extend preceding ideas in ways that were useful to the exchange (Gergen, 1995). They avoided actions that terminated the conversation and were able to furnish or request information to maintain the topical floor. Instead of listening to suppositions in a submissive fashion, they took an active stance toward others' ideas by questioning, challenging and extending them, and by incorporating them into their own utterances (Shotter, 1995). Prior utterances, thus, were treated as "thinking devices" rather than as self-enclosed messages (Shotter; Wells, 1999; Wertsch & Toma, 1995), allowing students to deepen their involvement in ways that were engaging to themselves and thought-provoking to others. In short, they had developed as speakers, listeners, and thinkers who could employ critical literacy practices to talk about, reflect on, juxtapose, and contest ideas (Luke & Freebody, 1997).

Although book discussions seemed to offer a potential site where students could develop voice and autonomy, it must be recognized that book discussions are not a panacea for the reading problems experienced by students with disabilities. Students with mild disabilities require explicit and balanced instruction in decoding, word recognition and basic skills, as well as frequent opportunities to read easy books in order to develop reading facility. What book discussions can add to a balanced literacy program is an instructional context for teaching social skills, discourse processes, literature response, communication skills, critical thought processes, and the literary aspects of literature. Often teachers in classrooms read books aloud. By adding a dimension that permits book discussions with assisted participation and feedback, teachers can address some of the cognitive and communicative needs of students with mild disabilities, as well as offer advanced instruction in higher-order thinking and literary criticism – two areas that complement the skills and meaning emphases of the reading curriculum.

Challenges for teachers. The change in teacher and student roles from January to June suggests the use of an apprenticeship model of teaching and learning (Lave, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Engaging in thoughtful conversations about books for the purposes of thinking and communicating was not a spontaneous process. Students with disabilities would not have progressed in taking authority over topics and the instructional conversation without the scaffolding and apprenticeship provided by the teacher. In fact, the change in book discussions reflected several features of an apprenticeship process insofar as the discussion evolved from heavily prompted and guided participation toward growing student autonomy, and then to the increasingly fluent participation of students in using the interpretative and social strategies associated with literary response.

The teacher accomplished these goals by posting the interpretative strategies, modeling and supporting particular forms of talk, prompting the social interaction among the various participants, and questioning students. Simultaneously, teachers and learners negotiated a delicate balance of participation. As learners gained expertise and control over the cognitive and communicative processes involved, the teacher relinquished her authority over the discussion. "Changing the nature of participation in learning activity simultaneously makes space for less-experienced learners to replace those who take the place of the more expert others before them" (Gutierrez & Stone, 1997, p. 124). Ultimately, for optimal learning to occur, the interactional roles had to be reversed, so students with LLD could learn to ask questions as well as answer them, and give direction as well as follow (Biemiller & Meichenbaum, 1998; Roth, 1993).

In addition to the challenges of blurring teacher and student roles for curricular purposes, this teacher also addressed critical institutional asymmetries (Heritage, 1997) as she pursued her goal of equipping students from "marginal and subordinate" environments (Shor, 1996, p. 14) to participate in a world characterized by privilege and power. She believed that the ability to participate in acts of reasoning and argumentation were fundamental to lifelong learning. In Ms. Travis's words:

I think generally in life and as they get older,... they're going to have to be able to communicate their needs, their wants, and what they agree with and what they disagree with,... be confident in what [they] say, defend it.

To accomplish her goal, Ms. Travis persisted through the initial breakdowns in conversational fluency and continually strived to transform her own role, substituting "contingent responsiveness" (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992, p. 97) for the institutional privilege that automat-

ically positioned her as the most prominent speaker whose decisions counted most in initiating turns and topics. She made visible procedural metaknowledge related to the ground rules for conversational management in order to help students acquire these skills, and modeled how to establish personal warrants that mark information as worthy of consideration by others (Heritage, 1997). Important, she arranged an apprenticeship where children's positions could be expressed, juxtaposed, challenged, validated, and transformed through the technical tools and processes associated with argumentation and reasoning (Pontecorvo & Sterponi, 2002). In turn, students with LLD became more metacognitive and self-regulating in shaping the course of their conversation and their dialogic involvement with topics, opinions and speakers.

Implications and Instructional Dilemmas

Implementing book discussions that promote conversational engagement and competence as well as depth of response to literature for young students with learning and language difficulties is both demanding and complex.

Developing conversational competency takes sustained time and effort. For researchers and teachers, certain instructional dilemmas must be considered when implementing book discussions. First, the findings suggested that students seemed to demonstrate increasing skill and self-assurance in interacting with each other around text. The teacher in this study found that the gradual transformation of student participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) was initially frustrating, but it seemed productive over time. In her reflections on the discussions, Ms. Travis stated: "[These two book discussions] show the growth process,... because once they'd learned how the book discussion goes, they all want to talk. I mean, they're all confident in giving their thoughts." Students decreased their dependence on the teacher to create and maintain alignments and oppositions in their discussion, and they showed they were capable of providing evidence and explanations to support arguments, requesting clarification from other speakers, and making personal connections with text. If the teacher had based her evaluation of book discussions on the January discussion, which at times sounded dysfluent, messy, and awkward, she may have concluded that the discussion format was ineffective and discontinued its implementation.

Good conversations take time to develop, and formative evaluations of book conversations should be considered as an important basis for informing, guiding, and adapting the instructional program in the short run to achieve long-term outcomes. Too often, teachers preclude implementing a discourse-laden activity because

of the language challenges it imposes on students with LLD, and ultimately, on teachers to make it work.

The issue is how teachers can evaluate the possible benefits of a literacy activity that emphasizes higher-order thinking and reasoning in the early grades. We recommend that audiotapes and videotapes be used to analyze the discussion over time from several perspectives, including: How are topics selected? To what extent is talk contingently related? What cognitive, linguistic, social, or interpretive response strategies are being employed? To determine how to support individual students, questions to address include: How do individual students contribute to the book discussion? What is the role of the teacher in the discussions? Maintaining a focus on these questions can help researchers and teachers support discussions in developmentally appropriate ways.

Providing contingent instruction in book discussions is a complex enterprise. A second dilemma is the instructional challenge to develop the type of instructional conversations that can lead intellectual development. To provide an apprenticeship that positions students to assume the targeted intellectual roles through the complementary processes of guided participation and participatory appropriation requires great sophistication on the part of teachers (Rogoff, 1993). An apprenticeship model requires that teachers make moment-to-moment decisions about individual students' linguistic, cognitive, and social needs. This is a highly complex process because the content of what students learn is not always defined in advance, strategies must be introduced and individualized for specific students or texts, students must engage in an unfamiliar communicative process, and responsibility must be shifted to students for directing the process. In addition, teachers must maintain attention to the flux of ongoing talk, assess current states of knowledge on an ongoing basis, follow the children's leads and contributions, and respond in a contingent fashion based on those assessments. Although several researchers have recommended the role of interactive dialogues within an apprenticeship model of teaching and learning (Butler, 1998; Stone, 1998), only a handful of literacy studies have examined this issue by examining teacher-student dialogues (Echevarria & McDonough, 1995; Englert & Dunsmore, 2002; Englert & Mariage, 1996; Goatley et al., 1995; Palinscar, 1986). More research needs to focus on the role of teachers and learners within an apprenticeship model and the manner in which a complex and dynamic instructional process that is efficacious for students with disabilities can be achieved. In this regard, book discussions might offer a rich terrain for studying the interactive dialogues of teachers and students (Goatley, 1997; Palinscar; Stone).

Collaborative discourse is crucial for student learning. The third dilemma for teachers is to create a "construction zone" where the teacher can guide participation, but also distribute responsibilities so that students can serve as resources for each other (Roth, 1993). Teachers can model and coach students in the use of interpretative and communication strategies, but students must have opportunities to apply those practices in collaborative activity where they can pool their resources and where their progressive talk can serve up ideas that are catalysts for deeper thought and intellectual activity (Roth). In these collaborations, students must learn to engage in negotiation, disagreement, and agreement as fundamental processes associated with thinking, learning, and knowledge building in a community (Wells, 1999). The collaborative and mediational processes associated with instructional conversations must be directly taught to students, and provisions must be made for helping students understand that challenging ideas and texts are the substance and outcomes of learning. Students must be given frequent opportunities to express their opinions and beliefs, to calibrate their ideas with peers, to challenge proposals, and to change their opinions in light of persuasive argument (Wells). Students must not only learn *from* talk, they must learn *to* talk with other individuals who bring together multiple sources of information (Daniels, 2001). Talking one's way into a deeper understanding by tapping into and contributing to the expertise of a community is fundamental to knowledge acquisition. This type of involvement is best accomplished in social settings where students have opportunities to engage in activities that are meaningful to them, over which they feel ownership, and where they have a sense of determination over their activities (Roth, 2002). Book discussions might fulfill these teaching objectives in a synergistic fashion by setting up an authentic situation where students have opportunities to pool their resources and to refine their knowledge through collective thought and action (Roth).

In summary, replacing a traditional classroom discourse pattern with a less familiar, more conversational model, is a complex task. Students need guided opportunities to learn and practice social and communicative behaviors that result in effective conversations where students listen to one another and build on one another's ideas so that topics are well developed, dialogue flows naturally, and literacy learning takes place in the context of social interactions. With such guided participation, students with LLD in the primary grades can exhibit greater mastery of the rhetorical practices that reflect their improved abilities to develop topics, to articulate reasons, and to challenge the ideas of others.

Conversation-based formats for engaging in analytical processes and employing interpretative tools can enable students to progress as thinkers and communicators who might not otherwise be able to participate because of reading, language, or learning disabilities. Future research needs to be conducted to determine whether such discursive opportunities can have long-term effects on the construction of literate identities for students with LLD, as well as the enhancement of their critical thinking and comprehension abilities.

APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions Used

:	Elongated sound
<>	Indicates very soft (barely audible) speech
ARE	Indicates emphasis (louder and higher-pitched speech)
/	Short pause, about 1 second per slash
//	Longer pause (2 seconds)
?	Marks the asking of question or a questioning tone
,	Indicates normal pause in speech
.	Marks the end of a sentence
!	Marks a very expressive question or comment
{	Marks onset of overlapping talk
()	Used for comments about actions such as paralinguistic cues (e.g., nods, pointing, demonstrating)
—	Used to call reader's attention to particular features of the conversation
{?}	Indicates that speech was not transcribable due to difficulty in hearing

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